

minister of the Crown, or of a member of the House, to judge whether closure should be introduced or not, you should remember it, Mr. Speaker, because Mr. Gladstone wished to keep up the dignity of the position of Speaker of the House of Commons. And yet to-day the right hon. the Prime Minister forgets the impartial position which the Speaker of the House of Commons should occupy and does occupy. He is not satisfied that in your hands this motion of closure would be in impartial hands. What does he do? He places it in the hands of a minister of the Crown. Are we not right in objecting to the procedure followed by the Prime Minister in introducing his motion of closure? Mr. Gladstone has been wrongly quoted in this House. Mr. Gladstone would never have put up with the indignities that have been offered to the position of Speaker in this House. What did Mr. Gladstone say? I refer you, Mr. Speaker, to a memorable speech of his which is reported in English 'Hansard' No. 274, on page 492. Here are Mr. Gladstone's words:

We have said that the Speaker, the one great impartial authority of the House—I am now speaking of the full House and not of the House in Committee, though we think the Chairman follows in the train of the argument—shall exercise this function; but in the exercise of this function that he shall appear as what he is—the officer of the House, not of the majority of the House. We will carefully keep away every semblance of a connection between the Speaker and the majority in the formation of his judgment or in inciting him to move.

Again, further on, on page 493, Mr. Gladstone is reported as follows:

We fundamentally and practically object to such a scheme—

That was a scheme of allowing any latitude to the majority in influencing the Speaker of the House of Commons.

We fundamentally and practically object to such a scheme; we would rather at once throw over this proposal with regard to the closing power than contaminate it by bringing the action of a party and party influence into connection with the Chair.

Again, Mr. Gladstone said:

It would be as possible, Sir, for a despot or a tyrant under our constitutional laws to sit on the throne of this country as it would be for a Speaker to retain the Chair of this House when once he had visibly and appreciably and practically made himself the slave of party passions.

For that reason, Sir, Mr. Gladstone placed upon the Speaker of the English House of Commons the duty of saying when the previous question should be moved, and when closure should be ap-

plied. Had that procedure been followed in this Parliament, perhaps the Opposition would have felt more secure. But what happened? The right hon. the Prime Minister, discarding the rule, that has been usually followed in this House, of placing in the hands of a committee the amending of the rules of procedure proposed of his own motion a resolution to amend the rules in a most unintelligible manner. I defy any hon. member of this House to understand thoroughly the meaning of those amended rules. No hon. member is capable of doing so, or of applying them for practical purposes. The right hon. the Prime Minister presented that resolution to stop discussion upon a vital question in this House, that of naval aid to Great Britain. After that had been done, the right hon. the leader of the Opposition naturally got up, as you would have done, Mr. Speaker, if you had been a private member of this House, and, using the experience which you had acquired during long years, you would have offered certain suggestions in respect to the amending of those rules. But in order to prevent that, the right hon. Prime Minister put up a member of the House of Commons and his Minister of Marine and Fisheries to prevent the right hon. the leader of the Opposition from offering any amendment. Of course the procedure was irregular. In the English House of Commons, Mr. Gladstone allowed hundreds of amendments. He himself proposed any number of amendments. The procedure which has been followed in this House is without precedent in the history of any civilized country. Hon. gentlemen opposite say that closure operates in certain countries, and they have instanced Belgium, Spain, and Poland. They could have gone further away and they could have come nearer home. They could have said that such a rule had been introduced in Victoria, Australia, and that it had been discarded and they could have said that, although it was in existence in other countries, it was rarely applied. Do you know, Mr. Speaker—you must know—why the previous question was first introduced? In an old edition of Mr. Todd's Parliamentary Law, 1840, we read the following:

When a proposition is moved which it is useless or inexpedient to discuss at the time, the previous question has been introduced for suppressing temporarily, the motion and its discussion.

Note the words. Was the naval question a question which it was useless or inexpedient to discuss? I should rather judge that would be inexpedient for the Government to discuss it. Mr. Todd goes on to say:

The proper occasion for the previous question is, when a subject is brought forward of a delicate nature, as to high personages, &c.,